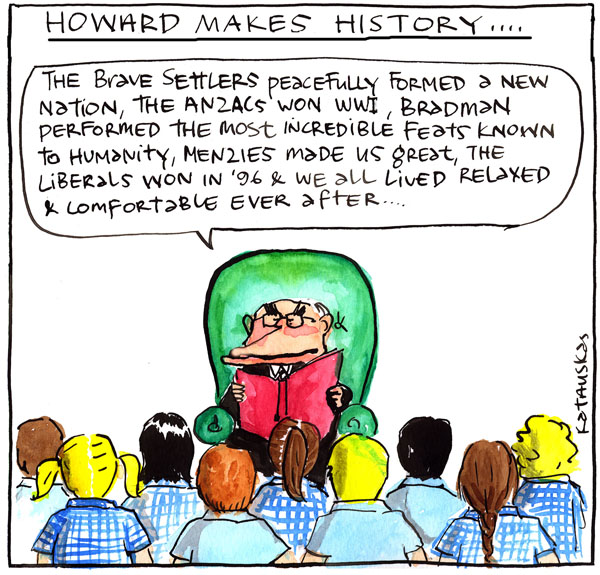
The History Wars: *contestability in history*

The 'Three Cheers' view vs the 'Black Armband' view of Australian History.

**SOURCE 1.**

*“****History isn’t what happened, but a story of what happened. And there are always different versions, different stories, about the same events. One version might revolve mainly around a specific set of facts while another version might minimize them or not include them at all****”*

*(JQuery – JSon, 2013).*

The Great Australian Silence

In 1968, Stanner coined the phrase, ‘the Great  Australian Silence’, to refer to the overly positive presentation of Australian history, which he arguedwas incomplete. He described what he saw as a deliberate effort to ignore the plight of ‘several  hundred thousand Aborigines who lived and died between 1788 and 1938 … (who were) ... in no  way consequential for the modern period’.

Manning Clark and Henry Reynolds subsequently became leading historians in a new field of Australian history that aimed to correct the selective representation of the past, and present facts about Indigenous Australian history.

Figure 1: http://fionakatauskas.com/political-cartoons/2006-2/

**Activity 1**

Read the following two sources below and answer the following questions in your notes. Note, there are TWO QUESTIONS that ask you to share your responses on the Class Wiki Discussion Forum after you have responded in your notes.

The Black Armband view vs the Three Cheers view

In 1993, historian Geoffrey Blainey described the two strands of the history debate:

**SOURCE 2 – Geoffrey Blainey, *In Our Time*, Melbourne, 1999**

*“To some extent my generation was reared on the Three Cheers view of history. This patriotic view of our past had a long run. It saw Australian history as largely a success. While the convict era was a source of shame or unease, nearly everything that came after was believed to be pretty good. There is a rival view, which I call the Black Armband view of history. In recent years it has assailed the optimistic view of history. The black armbands were quietly worn in official circles in 1988. The multicultural folk busily preached their message that until they arrived much of Australian history was a disgrace. The past treatment of Aborigines, of Chinese, of Kanakas, of non-British migrants, of women, the very old, the very young, and the poor was singled out, sometimes legitimately, sometimes not.... The Black Armband view of history might well represent the swing of the pendulum from a position that had been too favourable, too self congratulatory, to an opposite extreme that is even more unreal and decidedly jaundiced.”*

For further reading you may visit: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geoffrey_Blainey#Blainey_and_the_.22History_Wars.22>

**SOURCE 3 – Extract from John Howard’s Speech at the Australian Reconciliation Convention in Melbourne, May 1997.**

*“… all Australians—Indigenous and otherwise—need to acknowledge realistically the interaction of our histories. Our purpose in doing so should not be to apportion blame and guilt for past wrongs, but to commit to a practical programme of action that will remove the enduring legacies of disadvantage.*

*At the same time, we need to acknowledge openly that the treatment accorded to many Indigenous Australians over a significant period of European settlement represents the most blemished chapter in our history.*

Figure 2: Former P.M. John Howard (PM between 1996-2006)

*Clearly, there were injustices done and no-one should obscure or minimise them. We need to acknowledge as a nation what European settlement has meant for the first Australians, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and in particular the assault on their traditions and the discrimination and violence they endured over many decades … However, let me make this clear. Personally, I feel deep sorrow for those of my fellow Australians who suffered injustices under the practices of past generations toward Indigenous people. Equally, I am sorry for the hurt and trauma many people here today may continue to feel as a consequence of those practices.*

*In facing the realities of the past, however, we must not join those who would portray Australia’s history since 1788 as little more than a disgraceful record of imperialism, exploitation and racism.*

*Such a portrayal is a gross distortion and deliberately neglects the overall story of great Australian achievement that is there in our history to be told, and such an approach will be repudiated by the overwhelming majority of Australians who are proud of what this country has achieved although inevitably acknowledging the blemishes in its past history.*

*Australians of this generation should not be required to accept guilt and blame for past actions and policies over which they had no control.*

*However, we must acknowledge past wrongs, understand that they still cause a great deal of personal distress and resolve to improve areas of Indigenous disadvantage both now and into the future …”*

For the full transcript you may visit: <http://pmtranscripts.dpmc.gov.au/transcripts/00010361.pdf>

**Questions:**

**1. Which historical interpretation (Black Armband or Three Cheers) do John Howard’s opinions most closely align to?**

**2.** **Why are there competing views about Australian history?**

**3. How might the interpretation of Australian history affect Australia politically, socially and economically today?**

**Class Wiki Forum Discussion Questions:**

**4. *Why do you think politicians such as John Howard have become involved in the History Wars?***

***5. What evidence or sources would you look at to reach an opinion about which historians you agree with in the History Wars?***

# Activity 2

From the box below, **CATEGORISE** in your notes the information (events and ideas) into two lists that show the two differing views of Australian history: ***THE BLACK ARMBAND VIEW*** and ***THE THREE CHEERS*** ***VIEW***. Then, respond to the discussion question underneath in the Class Wiki Discussion Forum.

* Stolen Generation: Half- caste aboriginal children taken from parents and placed in White families to try and make them more 'white'; breed out their aboriginality.
* Federation in 1901 was a historical success of Australian colonisation.
* Aboriginal genocide (Black War) in Tasmania by White settlers in early 19th century (1828-1832).
* Kanaka (South Sea Islander) slave labour on Queensland cane fields from 1860s to 1903
* Frontier wars (violence against Aborigines by European settlers after settlement in 1788 up to the late 19th century, even as far as 1934).
* Australia is a liberal democracy (a country tha values human rights like freedom of speech and religion, equality, ability to vote etc.) the envy of the world.
* Government policy towards Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders has always been in their best interests.
* Chinese gold diggers discriminated against by European diggers during the Gold Rushes, and even killed in riots at Lambing Flats in 1861.
* Aborigines were nomadic people - moved around and didn't stay on one piece of land and farm - who didn't own the land: **Terra Nullius**

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**Class Wiki Forum Discussion: *Which of the two perspectives on Australian history above have you believed most to be accurate up until now? Any change as a result of this study so far?***

# Activity 3

View the following cartoon by Peter Nicholson on the History Wars. Follow the instructions beneath to demonstrate your ANALYTICAL SKILLS. Try to consider the two forms of analysing political cartoons mentioned earlier in the video: **Denotation** (description of what you see without interpreting the meaning) and **Connotation** (the meaning or message of the cartoon; what it intends the audience to think)



Figure 3: Political Cartoon by Australian cartoonist Peter Nicholson, 27 September 2003

1. Snip and paste the cartoon into your notes.
2. **DESCRIBE** what is happening in the cartoon without trying to interpret its meaning.
3. Now that you have taken time to observe what is happening in the cartoon you can begin to **INTERPRET** the cartoon:

* *Do you think the historian is really able to help the Aboriginal person laying on the ground because he has an academic qualification in history?*
* *What does the Aboriginal person laying on the ground represent?*
* *What is the cartoonist (Nicholson) saying about historians and the writing of history?*

1. Historian Geoffrey Blainey refers to the 'Black Armband view of history'. The black armband is worn when someone is mourning. Explain what taking a 'Black Armband of history' means.
2. The term 'White Blindfold' has also been used to describe the way Australian History has been depicted. What do you think is meant by that?